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**SERMON XCI.**

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**HUMAN DEPRAVITY, AND ITS REMEDY.**

JOHN, xv. 3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

THE word *clean* is often figuratively used in Scripture to express moral or spiritual purification. In this sense it is evidently used in this passage. The disciples, to whom Christ originally addressed the text, were once depraved, destitute of holiness, under the power of sin, prone to evil, and averse to all good. But they had all been cleansed from this original depravity, and had become habitually holy. The means or instrument by which this great moral change had been wrought upon them, was the word of Christ.

The same is true of all who are now the real disciples of Christ; they were once depraved, and they have been cleansed or made holy through the instrumentality of the word of Christ.

The text teaches, by implication, man's depravity; and instructs us how it may be remedied.

The object of the ensuing discourse will be,

I. To establish the fact of human depravity.

II. To speak of the remedy presented in the Gospel.

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I. As to the fact ; this is implied in the text. That the disciples had been made clean through the word of Christ which had been spoken unto them, evidently implies that they had previously been unclean, or destitute of holiness, and positively corrupt or depraved : and this is true of all mankind. By nature, or in their natural state, all are depraved—destitute of holiness—prone to evil, and averse to good continually.

This is proved by the declarations of the word of God, and by facts.

In the Scriptures we read, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." "What is man that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous?" "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes." Such is the testimony of God, in his word, respecting the native character of man; and it does unequivocally establish the universal and total depravity of human nature.

This testimony is abundantly confirmed by facts. The history of the world, in all ages, is a history of human depravity. The historic page is continually polluted with human crime.

But we need not recur to ages past for evidence of human depravity; the painful proof is ever before our eyes; we meet it constantly in our intercourse with our fellow-men. What do the deceptions and frauds so frequently witnessed in the commerce of men with each other, and by which multitudes are injured, and even ruined in their estates prove? They prove human depravity. The same is proved by the lying, and slander, and back-biting, and tale-bearing so common in society, and so destructive of social enjoyment. Mingle in society, and your ears are often assailed with oaths, and curses, and blasphemies—every one of them painfully illustrating the depraved and ruined character of man. Look at the awful profanation of

the Sabbath, in disregard of the solemn command of Jehovah, to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" and here again we behold striking evidences of man's depravity, and alienation from God. On every steamboat moving upon our waters on this sacred day, freighted with worldly and pleasure-seeking mortals, may be seen, written in broad capitals, **HUMAN DEPRAVITY**. The same is inscribed on all public and private vehicles, used in violating the Sabbath; and on every field, and shop, and dwelling where this day is profaned by secular business. And it is written on the forehead of every stroller in our streets and elsewhere, on this holy day. If men had the fear of God before their eyes they would not act thus; and were they not depraved, they would reverence God supremely.

Behold the multitude of human beings, who are impairing reason and destroying health, usefulness, reputation, property, peace of families, and life, by intemperance; and here again you may see abundant evidence of human depravity. Look at the numerous dram shops in our cities, towns, and villages, which, for the sake of gain, afford the means, and hold out temptations to this destroying sin—they are so many monuments of human depravity. Read the accounts weekly, and almost daily published, of forgeries, and thefts, and robberies, and murders, and then say, is not human nature depraved; and that to a dreadful degree?

Pass through the land, and survey our numerous prisons.—Every one of these is a monument of human depravity; for if man were not depraved, there would be no need of such places of punishment or confinement. The watchmen who patrol the streets of our cities and towns, and the very locks and bolts on our doors—all prove human depravity; for there would be no need of these, if men were upright and pure.

I might proceed multiplying facts in proof of human depravity. But it must be unnecessary. Every person must be convinced that man is a corrupt being; and that many have gone to dreadful enormities.

It is acknowledged, there are degrees in human depravity; and that some manifest much more than others. Still, however, depravity is universal. All, by nature, are vile. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh," or "carnal." Many who condemn the conduct of others, would, in similar circumstances, act as they do. If they had had the same education, and the same temptations, they might have acted out the vileness of the vilest. And even now, a change of circumstances would probably lead many a moral man,

by degrees, to criminal conduct, at which he would at present shudder. Hazael, the servant of Benhadad, repelled with indignation the predictions of the prophet Elisha respecting the cruelties of which he should be guilty towards the Israelites, saying, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" In this he was doubtless sincere. But Elisha explained the whole matter, by telling him his circumstances would be changed. "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

Indeed the truth is abundantly evident, both from Scripture, and the conduct of mankind, that, in their natural state, men are universally destitute of holiness. Selfishness, and not the love of God, or a regard to his authority and glory, rules in the heart of every natural man.

This native depravity is the source of all the numerous evils which distress mankind. It is the source of the wretchedness which exists in society. It makes the individual unhappy in whose heart it reigns; it keeps him a stranger to all the enjoyments of religion; it brings upon him much positive misery in this world; it often leads him to do much injury to others; disturbing and sometimes destroying their happiness; and while it continues to reign, it seals him up under the curse of God; and should he die in this state, he must be completely, unspeakably, and for ever miserable.

II. We ought, therefore, with deep interest, to inquire, is there any remedy for this diseased state of the human soul? and if so, what is it? Our text answers the question, and presents a remedy devised by infinite wisdom.

This remedy is, *the word of Christ*—"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." It was through the word of Christ that the apostles were cleansed from their native depravity, and made holy and fit for the service and enjoyment of God. And it is by the same word that sinners are now changed, the reign of depravity put down in their hearts, their evil propensities subdued, and they made holy.

By the *word of Christ* we are to understand, not only the instructions he personally gave when on earth, but also those of his inspired apostles; and, indeed, all the instructions of the Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments. They are all his word. For "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Now the Holy Ghost acted in subserviency to Christ in giving the Scriptures. The whole of them may therefore be called the

word of Christ. It is by means of the truth of Christ contained in the Holy Scriptures, that the depravity of man is removed, his evil propensities corrected, and he made holy.

But this is done by the word only *instrumentally*. The word, of itself, will never effect this great moral change in the human heart and character. The depravity is too great, and too deep-rooted to be thus overcome. The sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins," and he must be made spiritually alive. He is destitute of holiness, and a principle of holiness must be formed within him. This will be effected only by an Almighty power. The power that does effect this change is the Holy Spirit. He convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment; renews the heart; sanctifies the soul; works within it the Christian graces, and preserves and strengthens these graces. But in performing this work he makes use of "the word," as the instrument.

The word of Christ is the fire and hammer, by which the Holy Spirit breaks and melts the rocky heart. The word is the sharp two-edged sword, which, in his hands, proves quick and powerful, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and becomes a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is by the perfect law or word of the Lord, that the soul is converted. We are born of the Spirit; but "of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*;" and we are sanctified by the word; as our Savior prayed for his disciples—"Sanctify them *through thy truth*; thy word is truth."

The word of God, revealed by Christ, the great prophet of his Church, is, in the hands of the Divine Spirit, the grand remedy for the moral maladies of our world, which we have so much cause to deplore: and it is the only remedy. The fountain is bitter, and bitterness; and the streams which issue from it will also be bitter and poisonous, until the fountain be made good. And the Holy Spirit only will ever make this bitter fountain sweet, or change the depraved heart; and this he does through the instrumentality of the word of Christ.

Nothing else will ever work an effectual change. Philosophy will not do it. It was for ages tried, and men grew worse and worse. Education which rejects the truths of the Bible will not do it. This also has frequently been tried by men who have presumed to be wiser than God; but it has uniformly failed. Human laws will not do it. They may, and in a measure do, restrain wicked men, and prevent many overt acts of wicked-

ness ; but they do not correct the depravity of the heart ; and men who are disposed to do wickedly, whenever a temptation is presented, and they have the prospect of eluding detection, will be likely to act out their depravity. Punishment will not do it. The inmates of our penitentiaries, instead of being reformed by their sufferings, when they have finished their term of confinement, often return to society more hardened in depravity, and prepared for increased atrocities.

We have heard of a great moral change having taken place, and still in progress, in the state prison of Connecticut. But if it is genuine, and this time must test, it has been effected, not by punishment, but avowedly by the Bible, read, and preached, and explained, and enforced, accompanied with the special operations of the Holy Spirit.

Partial reformations may, and doubtless sometimes do, take place, in individuals, under the influence of some affliction, and from other causes, without the instrumentality of the truths of the Bible. But these reformations are seldom permanent ; the subjects of them, generally, soon relapse into their former habits ; and they never produce holy action. Depravity still reigns in the heart.

The word of God, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the only effectual remedy for human depravity ; and this has effected great moral changes. Many facts might be adduced in support of this position. At the first introduction of the Gospel, notwithstanding the multitudes who rejected it, the general change in favor of morality was very great. The same was true in regard to the countries in which the principles of the Reformation were promulgated and generally received. And in the present day, very great changes for the better have been made and are making, in society, at missionary stations in pagan countries. This is the case in the Sandwich and Society Islands ; in Ceylon ; and among the Hottentots in South Africa.

Farther, the power of the word of Christ to correct human depravity may be seen from a comparison of the state of society in general, in places in Christian lands where the stated and faithful preaching of the Gospel, and other means of acquaintance with the word of Christ, are enjoyed, with places where these means are not enjoyed, or only occasionally. And farther, the same is proved by the great and total changes, which we have seen this word, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, produce in individuals. We have seen it make the drunkard sober ; the profane



swearer fear an oath; the covetous man liberal; the fretful patient; the quarrelsome and revengeful mild; the vindictive forgiving; and the fraudulent honest. We have seen it restore peace and prosperity to suffering families; and we have seen it restore to the fond embraces of parents, a prodigal son, over whom they had often wept with almost hopeless anxiety.

Thus the word of Christ, contained in the Scriptures, through the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying it, has effected numerous and great changes for the better, in individuals, neighborhoods, and nations. It has effectually corrected human depravity; and it is the only thing that will do it. Both the Scriptures and the history of the world abundantly prove this position.

We ought therefore highly to prize the Bible. It contains the only remedy that has ever yet been found, or that ever will be found, to cleanse depraved man from his pollutions, and heal his moral diseases. It is the only thing which will allay and remove the vicious fever of his mind; restore him to righteousness, to his God, and to happiness; and fit him for heaven hereafter. And it is the only thing which will effectually meliorate the condition of society, and remove the evils which disturb its peace, and which many, even of those who are not the real disciples of Christ, deplore.

What enemies, therefore, to human happiness must those be, who slight the Bible, and who will not lend their aid to measures to diffuse a knowledge of it? and still more, those who reject it, and would lead others to do the same? Or who, while they profess to believe its divine authenticity, pervert its truths, and teach as its doctrines sentiments subversive of its convincing, renewing, and sanctifying influence? Such are scattering through society arrows, firebrands, and death. It is to the influence of the principles of those who oppose the Bible, or who, while they profess friendship for it, pervert its great truths, that we are to ascribe the prevalence of crime in the present day.

Would you, my hearers, arrest human depravity, and lessen crime in society? then diffuse, by every means in your power, a knowledge of the word of Christ. Not only a spirit of benevolence, which should lead you to seek the present and eternal good of others, urges to this; but also the peace and happiness of yourselves and your families. Let men universally be brought under the influence of the principles of the Gospel, and the crimes which now disturb society will be in a great measure unknown. Our ears will not then be pained with the language of profane men, nor our eyes with the sight of fellow-beings, reduced below the brutes by intoxi-

cation. Parents will not have their hearts wrung with agony over prodigal children ; nor wives and children be starved and abused by profligate husbands and fathers ; and our property and lives will be safe. No person under the influence of gospel principles will rob you of your property or good name, or burn your house, or commit violence upon your person.

The only effectual remedy for the numerous evils we deplore in society then is, the diffusion of a knowledge of the word of Christ. Let the Bible, therefore, be put into the hands of every family. Let competent and faithful ministers of the gospel be stationed in every part of the land, to proclaim, illustrate, and enforce the truths of the Bible. Let the dissemination of religious tracts on important truths of the Bible be generally encouraged. Let means of education be provided for the ignorant and destitute ; and in every school let the principles of the Bible be taught and inculcated. Let Sabbath Schools be every where established and patronised : and teachers be faithful to the pupils committed to their charge. Let parents and heads of families be faithful in the religious education of their children and household. Let every thing in society which turns men away from the instructions of the word of Christ, and prejudices and hardens them against them, be discountenanced. And let all these means be used with a sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit to give them efficiency, and with prayer for his influences to accompany them. Such a course will meliorate the character and condition of society, and correct the moral evils we deplore ; and this alone will do it. Every friend of man, therefore—every friend to the peace, order, and happiness of society, will be an efficient friend to institutions for inculcating and diffusing a knowledge of the word of Christ : while, on the other hand, the man who would hinder the influence of Gospel principles, is alike the enemy of his country and his God.



## SERMON XCII.

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### PERSUASIVES TO IMMEDIATE REPENTANCE.

*ACTS xxiv. 25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled; and answered, Go thy way, for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

FELIX was a Roman governor over the province of Judea. Paul was his prisoner, delivered to him by the Jews to be judged. He had already been subjected to a partial trial, but the cause was postponed for a farther hearing. In the mean time, from motives of curiosity, Felix sent for him that he might hear him concerning the faith in Christ. It was on this occasion that Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.

† In perusing this portion of sacred history, we are forcibly struck with the boldness and fidelity of this apostle. He was placed in circumstances of no ordinary temptation. Felix was a man of distinction, high in office and authority, and accustomed to be addressed only in the style of the most fulsome adulation. He was a man of profligate character, notorious for his injustice and licentiousness. Paul was his prisoner, and completely in his power. In such circumstances, how powerfully must the apostle have been tempted to humor the prejudices, and flatter the pride of the Roman governor. Had he been governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom, how carefully he would have selected his topic of discourse, how cautiously he would have avoided the least allusion to the vices of Felix, lest he should excite his displeasure, and bring down upon himself the weight of his vengeance. But Paul was not governed by the maxims of worldly wisdom. He acted under the influence of a nobler principle. He knew to whom he was responsible, and he feared God more than man. Duty, in his view, was a higher consideration than personal safety. He never made it his object to please men. To honor God, and to promote the salvation of

his fellow-men, were the great objects to which he constantly aimed. Influenced by these motives, he was raised above the fear of man. He thought little of the perils to which he was exposed. He thought little of the grandeur and dignity of the Roman governor. His mind was occupied by more weighty considerations. He thought of death and judgment, and an eternal state of retribution. He saw before him a sinner doomed to die, and he felt it to be his duty to make one effort to rescue him from the perdition to which he was hastening. He was acquainted with the character of his hearer, and he selected a topic suited to his case. Felix was an oppressor and an extortioner, therefore, he reasoned of *righteousness*. He laid open the law of God, and showed the obligation which rests upon all men, to do to others as they would that others should do to them. He descanted on the guilt and fearful condemnation of those who disregard the rights of their fellow-men, and who delight in acts of cruelty and oppression. Felix was a libertine. Paul, therefore, reasoned of *temperance*, or (according to a more literal translation,) of continence. He laid open the law of purity and its awful sanctions. And to enforce his reasonings, he appealed to the judgment to come. He pointed his hearer to that solemn day, when God will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his deeds.

This solemn and pungent discourse of the apostle was not without effect. Felix trembled. He was pricked in the heart. He felt that he was a sinner justly condemned and exposed to the wrath of Heaven. He saw that he must repent or perish; and, for the moment, he was half persuaded to abandon his vices and yield to the claims of the gospel. But his proud heart resisted. His corrupt inclinations pleaded for longer indulgence. There was now an awful struggle between his heart and his conscience; and, to end the strife and soothe the pangs of remorse which had seized upon his soul, he resolved to waive the subject for the present promising to give it, at some future time, all due consideration. Accordingly, he said to the apostle, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

We have no evidence that this convenient season ever arrived, or that the resolution with which he quieted his conscience was ever fulfilled. The probability is, that having resisted the Holy Ghost, he was given over to a reprobate mind, and was suffered to walk in the way of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes, till he had filled up the measure of his sins.

The experience of Felix, my hearers, has been the experience of thousands. There are few individuals who have enjoyed the privileges of the gospel, upon whose minds the truth has not at times made a powerful

impression. Most men have seen the time when they have trembled like Felix. But how many, like him, have yielded to the strength of a sinful inclination, and stifled the convictions of conscience with the promise of future repentance. This disposition to procrastinate a preparation for death is deep-rooted in the human heart, and forms a striking trait in the character of men. It is seen in the child, in the man of middle age, and in the gray-headed sinner. All are looking forward to a more convenient season, and flattering themselves with the hope of future repentance. This is the fatal spell which is ruining the world. It is the deadly opiate which is lulling men into the sleep of death.

It will be my object, in this discourse, to urge the duty of immediate repentance. And this I shall do, by presenting to your minds three considerations.

I. *Nothing is gained by delay.*

II. *Much is lost.*

III. *Every thing is hazarded.*

I. *Nothing is gained by delay.* Here permit me to appeal to my impenitent hearers, and to ask, What do you expect to gain?

Do you expect at a future time to be more able to repent than you are at present? What more ability do you need? And what new powers do you expect to possess? God has endued you with understanding to perceive the rule of duty, with conscience to feel obligation, and with will to choose between good and evil. Possessing these powers, you are complete moral agents, and have all the ability to obey the commands of God, that you ever will have, or ever can have; and if you cannot repent now, it is certain that you never can.

Do you expect to be more willing to repent at some future time, than you are now? What reason have you to flatter yourselves with this presumption? Do you find that your inclinations are changing for the better? Are your hearts becoming more susceptible of religious impressions, or more open to the influence of evangelical motives? Does continued impenitence tend to break the force of sinful habits, and create a relish for the service of God? On the contrary, are not your hearts daily becoming harder? is not your aversion to holiness increasing? and are not your habits in sin becoming more and more inveterate?

Do you expect that, at a future period, you will find fewer and less powerful temptations to encounter? This is a delusive hope. The adversary will never grow weary in his attempts to ruin you; and the farther you proceed in sin, the more completely you fall under his power. You are

advancing into an enemy's country, and every step you take renders your retreat more difficult and more hazardous.

Do you expect that, at a future period, there will be fewer crosses to take up, in entering upon a religious life? Go, ask the aged; they will tell you, that crosses multiply as life advances, and that no period, in this respect, is so favorable to the commencement of a religious course as the period of youth.

Do you expect that you shall hereafter find stronger inducements to repent than you do at present? What stronger inducements can be presented to your minds than have already been presented? You are now urged to repentance by all the motives which can be drawn from the world that now is, and that which is to come. You are urged by the command of Jehovah, by the dying love of the Savior, by the scenes of death and judgment, by the glories of heaven, and by the terrors of hell. And is not this enough? Is it not enough to know that you must live for ever; that you are sinners against God, and must repent or perish; and that the eternal state of your souls depends on the decision which you shall make in this little space of uncertain time? If you are not persuaded by these motives, what motives could influence your minds?

Do you expect, that at a future period more powerful means will be employed to effect your conversion? What more powerful means can be employed? You now enjoy all the means which God ordinarily blesses to the salvation of men. The very means which you enjoy, and which you have hitherto resisted, have been made effectual to the salvation of thousands. You have the Bible in your hands, you have heard the gospel preached from your childhood, and you have been warned by solemn and affecting dispensations of Divine Providence. If these means produce no effect upon your minds, you have no reason to suppose that any means will be effectual. No—"If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Do you expect that God will hereafter be more willing to save you? Can you flatter yourselves with such a vain delusion? Can you believe, that persisting in a course of disobedience is the way to propitiate the Divine favor, and to render God willing to save you? Is he not of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity?" and has he not declared that he is "angry with the wicked every day?" Depend on it, God will never be more willing to save you than he is now. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Come, for all things are now ready." God is willing to save you now: but that he will be hereafter you have no evidence. Before to-morrow your probation

may close, and your doom be sealed up for ever. Nothing therefore is gained by delay. But,

II. *Much is lost.* And, in the first place, you lose all the present happiness which religion is capable of affording. If you were sure of future repentance, you deprive yourselves of much rich enjoyment by delay. Perhaps, however, you flatter yourselves that this loss is more than compensated by the pleasures of sin. But what are the pleasures of sin? Are they substantial? Are they permanent? Do they afford peace and satisfaction to the mind? Do they allay the tumults of passion? Do they soothe the corrodings of care, and yield support and consolation under the bereavements and disappointments of life? Or are they not transient and unsatisfying? And are they not usually followed by the stings of remorse? Have you not found it true in your own experience, that "there is no peace to the wicked"—that their minds are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest?" But there is joy and peace in believing—a peace which passeth all understanding. The Christian's hope is an anchor to the soul, which moors him safe amid the billows of this tempestuous world.

I am aware that many are in the habit of associating gloom with the subject of religion, and of imagining that should they become religious, they must sacrifice all their temporal enjoyment. But why, my hearers, do you form this opinion of religion? Who has told you that piety is incompatible with happiness in the present life? Are they not those who know nothing of its influence on the mind? And will you go to such for information on this subject? Would you ask a blind man, how colours appear? Or a deaf man, what pleasure music affords? Just as competent judges are they of these things, as the unrenewed sinner is of the effects of religion. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." Ask the experienced Christian. He knows what are the pleasures of sin, and what are the pleasures of religion, for he has tasted them both, and is therefore a competent judge of their relative value. And what does he tell you? Does he not say, that one hour spent in the enjoyment of God transcends a life of sinful pleasure? To this testimony, which, in all other cases, would be deemed sufficient, you have superadded the testimony of God. He has told you, that "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;" and that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Now all this happiness you sacrifice, by delaying repentance.

Nor is this all. How many opportunities for usefulness do you lose. Suppose you should postpone repentance five years longer. In this time, how much you might do for God and his church. How many souls you

might be instrumental in saving, whom, if you continue impenitent, you may perhaps be instrumental in destroying. How much remorse of conscience, how much work for bitter repentance, you might avoid. Besides, how much you might do to accumulate a treasure in heaven, to increase your stature in holiness, and to prepare yourselves to become larger vessels of mercy, and more distinguished stars of glory, in the firmament above. Do you, my hearers, intend to be saved—and do you wish to be dwarfs in the kingdom of heaven? Do you wish *just* to be saved—to go to heaven covered with everlasting shame because you set out so late? O, my hearers, if you should finally arrive at heaven, for your present delay you will suffer endless loss. But,

III. You not only gain nothing, and lose much, by delay, but *you hazard every thing*. You hazard your souls: and “what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul.” You know, my hearers, that you must repent or perish. You know also that this life is the only season of probation;—that “there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge, in the grave whither you are going;” and that if repentance is delayed till life closes, all is lost for ever. And need I tell you that life is uncertain? You have witnessed the ravages of death. You have seen one after another dropping around you into the world of spirits. And who are those that are daily summoned to the grave? Are they always the aged, the sickly, or the pious? Does death always give notice of his approach? Does he stop to inquire of his victim whether he is prepared to die? On the contrary, are not persons of all ages, and of every variety of character, promiscuously swept away by the stroke of death? Does not death often come as a thief in the night, and execute his commission without the least premonition? How many within the circle of your acquaintance have been suddenly surprised, and taken from the world in the midst of the most flattering prospects of earthly happiness. In an instant, all their plans were thwarted, and all their expectations blasted. Youth and beauty, health and vigor, are no security against the approach of death.

“Great God, on what a slender thread,  
Hang everlasting things!”

“The spider’s most attenuated thread,  
Is cord, is cable, to man’s tender tie  
On earthly bliss.”

Go to yonder grave-yard. Take a view of the graves with which you find it crowded. Do you not find them of every size, from six feet to a span in length? Read on the tombstones the ages of those who people that land



of silence, their occupations in life, and the circumstances of their death: and tell me, is not life uncertain? Can you put confidence in the prospect of future days? How dare you then risk your salvation on the hope of future repentance?

Besides, consider in whose hand your life is. It is in the hand of that God against whom you have rebelled, and who now commands you to repent—that God whose *mercy* you have long abused, and whose patience you have wearied. Dare you provoke him farther? At any moment, he can sunder the thread of life, and you fall to rise no more. That he will not do it, he has given you no assurance. That he will do it, he has given you much reason to fear. In great mercy he has spared you hitherto while you have disregarded his commands, his entreaties, and his warnings. But there is a limit to his forbearance. He is just and true, as well as merciful; and *the day of vengeance is in his heart*. And I ask again, dare you provoke him farther? You know that you are absolutely dependent on God for the continuance of life; and if you have resolved to defer repentance another year, will you not earnestly beseech him to spare your life another year? But dare you offer that prayer? Dare you fall down in the presence of God, and solemnly beseech him to spare your life another year, that you may spend it in sin? With such profane mockery on your lips, would you not expect to be smitten dead like Ananias and Sapphira? But are you not virtually doing this while you postpone repentance? You hope to live. You ardently desire to live. It is the prayer of your heart that God would spare your life, for the express purpose that you may live in disobedience to his commands. O, my hearers, do you know how fast you are filling up the measure of your sin?

But the danger of deferring repentance arises not merely from the uncertainty of life. Were you sure of future days, it would be infinitely hazardous to delay. You are in danger of being given over to judicial blindness and hardness of heart. There is a point, beyond which if the sinner goes, his case becomes desperate. No means can reach him. No motives can effect him. He is abandoned of God. The Holy Spirit has ceased to strive with him, and has bidden him an everlasting farewell. God has said concerning him, he is joined to idols, let him alone. Now, to this point, every impenitent sinner is tending, if he has not already reached it; and every day's delay brings him nearer to it. His heart is growing less susceptible of religious impressions—his conscience is becoming seared as with a hot iron—the means of grace are losing their power to affect him—his enmity to God, and aversion to holiness, are gaining strength—his neglect of duty is ripening into a confirmed habit; and the prospect of future repentance becomes darker and darker, till it is finally shrouded in eternal night.

If, my hearers, you are not willing to repent now, you have fearful reason

to apprehend that you never will be willing. Dream not of a more convenient season. Such a season you will never see. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* Now is the best time you will ever enjoy to secure your immortal interests, and it may be the only time. And why is it not a convenient season? All the difficulty lies in the wickedness of your hearts; and that difficulty is not diminishing, but increasing. The same motives which influence you now to delay, must operate with redoubled power hereafter. O, then

"Be wise to day, 't is madness to defer;  
Next day the fatal precedent will plead  
Thus on, till wisdom is pushed out of life."

I have now laid before you the three considerations which I proposed in the beginning of this discourse; and I ask you to bring them distinctly before your minds. Weigh them candidly, and come now to some decision. *Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.* You see that nothing is gained, that much is lost, and that every thing is hazarded by delay. Will you not then solemnly resolve that you will delay no longer? that from this time forth, you will renounce every idol, and devote yourselves to the service of the living God? I pause for you to decide.—Remember, God is present, and is looking upon your hearts. Attending angels are waiting in awful suspense. Remember also that the choice which you now make, may decide your destiny for ever.—Have you decided? What is your determination? Have you resolved that you will serve the Lord—that henceforth religion shall be the first and the great business of life? Are there not some at least in this assembly, who have formed this resolution? Or have you, my dying fellow-sinners, resolved still to delay—to venture on a little farther in the road to ruin—to presume a little longer on the forbearance of your Judge—and a little longer to run the awful hazard of losing your souls? O, have any of you come to this rash conclusion? Have you told your Maker ("for thoughts are heard in heaven"), that you will not now yield to his demands—that you will still persist in your rebellion? O, retract that rash resolution, lest it prove your ruin. Perhaps, while you have resolved to persist in impenitence, God has resolved that you shall never enter into his rest. Beware, I beseech you, how you trifle with your Maker. Beware, lest that come upon you which is written; "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."